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Information Literacy: Developing partnerships across library types

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Abstract

This article describes a grant-funded project with the final goal of creating information literacy collaborative partnerships among academic, school and public libraries. The objectives of the grant are described as well as an overall description of the project are stated. The emphasis of the article is on process followed to create the collaborative partnerships and the partnerships created as a result of the grant.

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1. Introduction

Collaboration is becoming increasingly important in libraries. This can range from consortium database purchases to sharing a single OPAC. A new area of emerging collaboration is library instruction and especially information literacy. To this end, in 2000, the Rochester Regional Library Council (RRLC) applied for and received a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant titled "Information Literacy for Electronic Resources: Developing Information Literacy Skills Across Library Types," to raise awareness of the importance of information literacy in the community. This cooperative grant was proposed by the RRLC, Monroe County Library System, Rochester City School District, Pioneer Library System, Monroe No. 1 BOCES, Monroe No. 2 BOCES, Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES, and Genesee Valley School BOCES. Because the grant involved Rochester, NY area libraries of all types (school, public, and academic/special), one of the main purposes was the establishment of collaborative ventures/projects and partnerships to promote information literacy as it related to library technology and electronic information resources.

2. Goal and Objectives

The goal of the grant was to empower library users to be effective, critical, and independent consumers of electronic information. To accomplish this goal, the following four objectives were set.

- Objective 1. To increase awareness and understanding among the library community of the need for information literacy skills for library users in the electronic environment.
- Objective 2. Train library staff in the instruction of electronic information literacy skills.
- Objective 3. Improve communication among the library community in information literacy issues and programs.
- Objective 4. Develop collaborative projects.

3. Project Description

The Project Manager was designated based on her experience with information literacy, her interest in the grant, and her membership on the RRLC Information Literacy Committee that would be carrying out the grant. The Manager's involvement with instruction and information literacy stems from her work as Reference/Instruction Librarian at State University of New York (SUNY) College at Brockport where she was in the process of developing a new general education course entitled "Oral Communication and Information Literacy" with a faculty member from the Department of Communication. The goals of the grant seemed a match for her abilities and gave her the opportunity to extend her experience with information literacy into K-12 and public libraries.

Because the Project Manager was already familiar with information literacy in the academic setting, her first task was to become familiar with information literacy in the K-

12 and public library settings. Gathering information on collaborative partnerships was also an important function of the Project Manager. The grant was timely because 2001 ACRL President Betsy Wilson's theme was "Communities and Collaboration." The Information Literacy Community Partnerships Toolkit (<http://library.austin.cc.tx.us/staff/lnavarro/CommunityPartnerships/Toolkit.html>), as well as a series of articles in *C&RL News* (Fugate, 2001; McKinstry & Garrison, 2001; Moore & Engeldinger, 2001; Petrowski, Baird, Leach, & Noyes, 2000; Rader, 2001; Todaro, 2000a, 2000b; Wilson, 2000), provided helpful information about establishing partnerships.

The first three objectives of the grant were achieved between January and June 2001. Activities included differing workshops on information literacy topics, finding and comparing information literacy standards, developing presentations to be used in academic and public libraries as well as meeting with library groups in the area to tell them about the project and to discuss information literacy issues. A grant website was created (<http://www.rrlc.org/infolit/infolit.html>) as part of the first objective of the grant. The website includes definitions of information literacy from several different sources, a comparison of information literacy standards (ACRL and AASL), model program statements, PowerPoint presentations to be used in the K-12, academic and public library settings, a listing of the best information literacy tutorials, guidelines for collaborative partnerships, and a bibliography. Descriptions of collaborative projects helped by the grant were included as well as contact information for the participants.

4. Collaborative Partnerships

The final objective of the grant, developing collaborative partnerships, has been an ongoing process and is still continuing since the conclusion of the grant in September 2001. The grant Coordinating Team, comprised of the Project Manager and two public and two school librarians, worked together to bring projects to fruition. The first decision the team made was to find librarians that were interested in creating partnerships and who had ideas for a library that they would prefer to partner with. At the first information literacy workshop held in January 2001 as a kickoff to the grant, participants were asked whether they were interested in partnerships and for their contact information so we could follow up with them. The response from this was greater than anticipated and a follow-up email was sent to those who expressed interest.

The Coordinating Team then decided to set guidelines for the collaborative partnerships. The goal with these guidelines was to have a framework in place for the libraries to use when setting up their partnerships. A subcommittee was formed consisting of the Project Manager and one school and one public librarian. First, the committee looked at guidelines in place in the existing institutions represented. Most of the guidelines looked at covered more housekeeping issues such as when groups should visit and how big they should be. In the first draft of the committee's guidelines, the focus was on these "housekeeping" issues. In order to keep the emphasis on information literacy, the revised guidelines focused on the four areas of information literacy. The four areas are:

- Students will be able to recognize when information is needed
- Students will know where and how to discover the needed information

- Students will be comfortable using a variety of tools to find, modify and assimilate the information
- Students will be able to critically evaluate and synthesize the information

The committee also decided to concentrate on school groups visiting public and academic libraries. In this way, the committee was able to document the responsibilities of each librarian in the process. This allowed for the definition of the responsibilities of the school/public/academic librarian and helped with assessing whether potential time constraints would make a partnership feasible (see Appendix A).

After the guidelines were completed in April and presented to the Coordinating Team, the team decided to hold a meeting in June for those librarians who had expressed an interest in partnerships in January. The meeting first covered some general information about partnerships and how they work, and then became a working session for librarians to plan their partnerships. At this meeting a hospital librarian and a public librarian spoke about their consumer health partnership as an example of a collaborative venture that works. A partnership worksheet was also distributed that asked librarians to give a description of their project, contact information, any potential issues of working together, and any assistance they might need in getting started.

5. Partnerships Formed

As a result of the process outline above, the following partnerships were developed.

- **Rochester City School District/Rochester Public Library/University of Rochester**

Project Description: These three libraries will be collaborating on a project for the Rochester City School District. Using a pilot school in the fall, the assignment involves students studying and reading about public policy and the process for effecting change and then each writing a position paper on a public policy issue that the student would like to see implemented or changed. The students must also create a 5-7 minute individual or group presentation that can involve a skit, debate, panel presentation or PowerPoint presentation.

- **Brockport High School/SUNY Brockport**

Project Description: Brockport High School and SUNY Brockport will be collaborating with the AP and Honors English classes. The assignment deals with literary criticism and oral presentations.

- **Churchville-Chili High School/SUNY Brockport**

Project Description: These two libraries will be collaborating on an AP European History assignment involving research of a historical European character. Students will be provided with the following data: gender, age, city or location, an occupation and a historical date. From this starting point, students must then use primary and secondary sources and be able to discuss the political, economic, social, religious and intellectual setting, provide a daily life description, and do a character interview

where the student must remain in character, speak with confidence and use historically accurate dialogue.

- **SUNY Student Resource Center/EOC**

Project Description: These two institutions, extensions of the SUNY Brockport campus in downtown Rochester, have come to the conclusion that their user populations are very similar and because they are geographically close to each other, want to form a partnership to help their users. Many of their users come in lacking basic skills. They were excited about a proposed consumer “wellness” project and see it as a possible way to get their users started on basic skills since there is always a demand for consumer health information.

6. Future

As these projects move forward, the RRLC Information Literacy Committee, led by the former Project Manager, will be in contact with partnering libraries to follow their progress. The follow-up plan includes contacting the libraries involved in partnerships to check on progress as well as sending participants a brief survey that will ask partners to describe what went well, what could have been done better, what was the reaction of the students and librarians involved, and what their plans are for the future.

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Appendix A

Recommended Guidelines for School/Public/Academic Libraries Working in Partnership

To be information literate, a student must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information. Library media specialists and public/college librarians can enable students to achieve these skills by establishing collaborative partnerships when planning class visits and by using the following recommended guidelines.

Students will be able to recognize when information is needed

Responsibility of the school librarian working with the teacher:

Have the students determine a realistic need for using sources outside the school library based on:

- Not enough sources for the topic in the school library
- An assignment with resources that can only be found in a public/college library

Students will know where and how to discover the needed information

Responsibility of the school librarian:

After the students have exhausted the sources in the school library. Be sure that they:

- Compile a list of further sources from bibliographies found in school library sources, such as further reading suggestions at the end of books.
- Print out titles of books from the Internet site of the library to be visited

Prior to the actual visit, the school librarian visits the classrooms with:

- A handout of key reference sources and/or areas to check that are unique to the public/college library, with examples of pages from reference sources to be used at the outside library
- Map of the library building to be visited
- Explanation of the difference between Dewey and LC if applicable

Responsibility of the public/college librarian:

Prior to the students arrival:

- Send a handout to the school librarian of key reference sources and/or areas to check unique to the public/college library that fit the topics of the students.

Upon the students arrival:

- Pull reference material appropriate to the assignment and put on a book cart
- Distribute appropriate handouts to the classroom
- If there is time, give the class a tour of the library
- If needed, provide instruction in the use of the OPAC to the students
- If needed, provide additional instruction in the use of specified reference sources and databases unique to the public/college library that may be of use to the students

Students will be comfortable using a variety of tools to find, modify and assimilate the information.

Responsibility of the school/public/college librarian:

Have the students understand the similarities and differences between libraries. For example, the search strategies for the online catalogs are similar, while the call numbers can differ.

Have the students use time management skills to identify the most useful information given the amount of time allotted. For example, using microfiche for periodicals may be too labor intensive, while browsing the book collection in the area of the research topic may be productive. It is especially helpful to have the students check different types of sources.

Have the students recognize the need to be selective in their choice of the many online databases to get the information they are looking for. There may be search strategies unique to each database that may require a mediated search.

Have the students make educated choices for searching subscription periodical databases. One way to teach this is to first have the students think about the broader subject area (humanities, social sciences, etc.), then find databases that cover that area.

Reacquaint the students with Boolean searching and help them understand the basic logic behind it.

Students will be able to critically evaluate and synthesize the information.

Responsibility of the school/public/college librarian:

Have the students critique the information found based on evaluation criteria. For example, is the information up-to-date, not too technical, unbiased and authoritative? They should also determine what format the information comes in, (i.e. Microfilm, full-text online, etc.)

Along with the above Information Literacy Guidelines, the following are 'housekeeping' activities that can help ensure a successful class visit:

1. Making a request:

The school Librarian is the best person to make a request. Public/college libraries should consider whether they would take calls from school teachers or if they should tell the teachers to confer with their LMS who will then call if the assignment warrants a visit.

2. Scheduling a visit:

Schools: Librarian and teacher should submit field trip request for date that is agreeable to both the school and the library they are to visit. A lead-time of a month is more helpful. Every effort should be made to accommodate the library to be visited. Prior to the visit, the school librarian should send a copy of the students' assignment and resources used at the school library to the public/college librarian.

Colleges: The best time for classes to visit is when the college is not in session. The college should consider when it would be best to schedule classes outside intercessions/when classes are in session.

Public Libraries: Arrangements for a group visit should be made at least two weeks in advance. Those planning K-6 visits for the popular spring months should make arrangements several months in advance.

3. Accompanying the group:

Both the teacher and the school librarian should expect to go to the public/college library.

4. Visiting group size:

The size of the visiting group should be discussed with the individual public/college library along with the visiting school. The smaller the group the better. Some colleges limit the size to 20, some say never more than 30. A large public library can accommodate up to 50 students, however to ensure a satisfactory visit for all, it is strongly recommended no more than 30 students attend at one time.

5. Borrowing privileges:

The college library should decide if it is able to lend materials to the school groups that visit. If so, the library should decide if only the teacher can borrow books or whether individual students can get college library cards.

6. Evaluating the visit:

After the visit, a questionnaire should be distributed to students and library staff to determine how profitable the visit was, how to improve the visit, and to solicit advice for future groups.

7. Following up after the visit:

Public/college librarian and the school librarian correspond to receive feedback and make recommendations for improvement for future class visits.